



WITH

Peeks at the Past

in

EAST CHICAGO, INDIANA

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**PEEKS**

**AT THE**

**PAST**

by

**STEWART L. WELLS**

Issued by

**East Chicago Historical Society  
East Chicago, Indiana**

**LAKE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY**



## AMERICA

AMERICA, my native land,  
With fertile fields and azure skies,  
A multitude of nations  
Within your bosom lies.

Snowcapped mountains reaching high  
Valleys hug the earth,  
A million words could not describe  
Your beauty or your worth.

AMERICA, my native land,  
The freedom bell doth toll,  
And flies on isotopes of love  
And warms the human soul.

Not stress, nor strife, nor battle gloom,  
Could dim the vision bright,  
But sanctify the dawn of day  
And rectify the night.

No noble deed, or act of strength,  
No mother's prayer, or father's son,  
No sacrifice esteemed too great  
For freedom born, for victory won.

AMERICA, my native land,  
Etched in my heart to stay,  
And this I know: in time to come  
Shall dawn your brightest day!

Janice Hansen

Note: This poem by Janice Hansen won first prize in the Poetry Contest conducted by the Lake County Poetry Club for 1976, which had as its theme the Bicentennial Year. Quoted by permission of the author.



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## INTRODUCTION

"A Peek at the Past" is a collection of vignettes. The title was suggested by the Lake County Cooperative Public Relations Committee for radio broadcast during the Bicentennial Year, 1976. All the public libraries of the District participated in the program.

A search for documentaries and little-known facts, not usually included in local and state histories, resulted in a collection of facts guaranteed to infect the senior reader with nostalgia. The subjects treated will give the junior reader a sampling of the historical foundations of East Chicago. Something more than the basic facts are presented. Details are included where a significant contribution to the social, industrial, commercial and religious fabric of today's community is apparent.

Inevitably, the readers will question the inclusion of some subjects and bemoan the exclusion of others. The foremost criterion in the selections used for broadcasting the chronicles was the interest factor. No attempt was made to present the subjects chronologically.

Stewart L. Wells, Assistant Director of the East Chicago Public Library, compiled and edited the histories to be broadcast from Station WJOB and selected the following people to broadcast the chronicles: Margaret Paul, Herb Hobbs, Dr. Robert Krajewski, Sister Stephen, Louise Galambos, Robert D. Wood, Dr. Anthony Lenzo, Dan Simon, Gail Pugh, Robert Stiglich, Jack Fogelman, Harold Fife, Richard Philpot, Margaret Jones, Judge Frank Callahan, Julia Timmer, Jean Templeton, Rev. William Timmer, Rev. Robert Davis, Bertha Givens, Sister Mary Zachary, Rose LeVan, Louis Figueroa and Charles M. Squarcy.

Mr. Wells presented the East Chicago Historical Society with copies of the histories for the files.

The Indiana Collection of the East Chicago Public Library provided the reference materials used in the preparation of the vignettes.

Margaret P. Jones  
Member, Board of Directors  
East Chicago Historical Society

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## THE SOUTH SHORE LINE

The predecessor of the South Shore Line was the Chicago and Indiana Air Line Railway. The title sounds impressive, but it was a limited venture. The line was incorporated in December 1901. By 1903 the company had completed and opened a 3.4 mile streetcar route between East Chicago and Indiana Harbor. Construction of the route ran into difficulties in a dispute with the Hammond, Whiting and East Chicago Railway. The dispute was resolved by both companies laying competing double tracks down Chicago Avenue. The Chicago and Indiana Air Line had bigger things in mind. The charter called for construction of a railroad extending from South Bend to East Chicago, and before the initial East Chicago line opened, the company obtained franchises for operation through the streets of South Bend and Michigan City. In 1904 the corporation's name was changed to the Chicago, Lake Shore and South Bend Railway.



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## A PIONEER JUDGE

Byron M. Cheney was the first Justice of the Peace in East Chicago. There are many amusing incidents in his pioneer career. The largest marriage fee that he received was the sum of ten dollars. The smallest fee came from a couple hailing from Chicago. While they had a license, they had no money to get back home. So the kind-hearted judge made them a present of the ceremony as well as buying them each a return ticket to Chicago. He was frequently written up in the Chicago papers, being called the "outof-door court Judge." This began on an exceedingly hot day when he started the innovation of holding court outside, on his lawn. Mrs. Cheney, however, objected for the reason that the court "Hangers-on" destroyed the lawn and her flowers. Because of his courtesy to his wife, it is needless to add the objection was sustained.



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## INLAND STEEL'S BEGINNINGS

In 1897 the Inland Steel Company was in a position to expand from its rolling mill in Chicago Heights. Through wise investments, Inland was able to finance a new plant in Indiana Harbor. When Leopold E. Block visited the site in Indiana Harbor, granted Inland Steel by the Lake Michigan Land Company, he found 20 of the 50 acres were covered by Lake Michigan. The only person in the area was the watchman in a lonely railroad tower. Block went to New York and made arrangements for transporting construction workers to the site. He also persuaded Owen F. Aldis to build a hotel for accomodating company officials and engineers. In 1901 construction was begun and in July, 1902, the first ingots to be poured in the East Chicago area were made at the new Inland plant.



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## ST. CATHERINE'S HOSPITAL

In May, 1928, St. Catherine's Hospital was opened in a ceremony conducted by the Most Reverend John F. Noll, Bishop of Fort Wayne. The original cost of construction was \$1,300,000. Half of this money was paid by the industries of East Chicago and the other half by the Mother House of the Ancilla Domini Sisters. The hospital property occupies a block of ground with its entrance on Fir Street. The original building was five stories, fire-proofed and E-shaped to allow a maximum amount of sunlight and air. St. Catherine's filled a long-felt need as citizens of East Chicago had previously been dependent on nearby communities for hospital service. The hospital is named after Catherine Kasper, who had distinguished herself by rendering aid to the people of Dernback, Germany, in the field of visiting nursing.



[illegible]



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## TOD OPERA HOUSE

In 1890 one of East Chicago's most impressive structures was the Tod Opera House. It was named after Robert E. Tod, secretary and treasurer of the Kennedy-Tod Company in New York. This three story brick structure was located on the southwest corner of Indianapolis Boulevard and Chicago Avenue. According to its admirers the opera house would have done justice to a city of twenty thousand although East Chicago's population at the time was a mere twelve hundred.

The Tod Opera House was the heart of the community. Its three stories served many varied functions. The first floor was occupied by stores. The second was a theatre, where traveling stock companies presented plays. The third was the setting for many spirited political meetings. Schools and churches presented large programs in the auditorium. One of the early churches in East Chicago held its services here.

On Sunday, March 10, 1907 the Tod Opera House was destroyed by fire, but the building had been of major importance to the early citizens of East Chicago.



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## FIRST ELECTRIC LIGHT IN EAST CHICAGO\*

The first electric light plant was a home-made affair built by Andrew Wickey, an inventor of farm machinery who came to East Chicago in 1887 and established the Famous Manufacturing Company in the 4700 block of Railroad Avenue. Mr. Wickey's plant was successful in supplying electricity to light his home at Olcott and 145th Street (still standing.) As other citizens wanted the same service, he added more motors to generate the electricity. But occasionally something went wrong and the power was shut off. Then Mr. Wickey would blow the plant whistle. One long blast meant the power was off; two meant the trouble was not serious, and three blasts meant the power would be off for a long time, so the women could get their lamps ready for the evening.

\* This account is from reminiscences of early East Chicago contributed to the Historical Society by Mrs. H. E. Zoeger, granddaughter of Andrew Wickey.



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## INDIANA HARBOR CANAL

In the early days of East Chicago and Indiana Harbor, growth was in part due to the Indiana Harbor Canal, constructed by the East Chicago Company. It was created as a supplement to the railroad facilities as an aid to the steel industries of East Chicago. Although the canal was constructed through private financing the Federal government maintained and controlled its improvement. The canal extends southwesterly from the shore of Lake Michigan for 1-2/5ths miles. It then branches to the south for 2 miles to the Grand Calumet River and west 2 miles into the north end of Hammond. The canal is 200 feet wide and has a depth of 20 feet. Early East Chicago industries purchased land along the canal and enjoyed its use in their development.



## EAST CHICAGO'S FIRST MERCHANT

The first merchant in East Chicago was Fred J. Fife, who was born December 1, 1865 in Hastings, Canada. He was the nephew of Col. R.D. Walsh pioneer. Mr. Fife took the position as bookkeeper and paymaster for Colonel Walsh, who had the contract for laying out and paving the streets of East Chicago. Mr. Fife began his business of men's clothing in December of 1898, and turned the first sod on the corner of Indianapolis Boulevard and Chicago Avenue for the laying out of the present city. He was elected the first Town Clerk and received the appointment of Postmaster from President Cleveland on February 16th, 1894, and held the office for five years. Mr. Fife helped organize the first Democratic Club of East Chicago and acted as secretary and treasurer.



EAST CHICAGO JOURNAL

On July 30, 1889, the *East Chicago Journal*, the first newspaper in East Chicago and edited by Herman Hirsch, ran the following editorial: "The proper officials who have charge of our township for schools should look out for our little ones' interests. We have nearly 200 children running around the street, and provision must be at once made. Let the disgrace not fall upon the State of Indiana that the people should say, 'Here is the model town of East Chicago with 1200 inhabitants and no school.' This would indeed be a disgrace to the Commonwealth, with hundreds of thousands of dollars of school money lying idle, and here for want of which, perhaps on some technicality, should be deprived of (that) which bring enlightenment, knowledge, and power. We hope the Auditor will look into this, and act."



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## EAST CHICAGO WOMAN'S CLUB

On March 18th, 1902, a group of young women met and decided to form a literature study group, the Tuesday Reading Club of East Chicago. Its object was intellectual, educational and social culture. Meetings were held weekly and consisted of discussions of classics and civic events. On June 20th, 1912, the Tuesday Reading Club and the Music Club merged to become the East Chicago Woman's Club. The purpose of the club was to provide an opportunity for continuing intellectual and cultural growth, to train for citizenship and to study all phases of homemaking. With that in mind programs were planned. Under the leadership of Mrs. J. D. Kennedy, the club established East Chicago's first public library and aided the library in obtaining Carnegie funds for the construction of two library buildings, one at Chicago and Baring avenues, the other at Grand Boulevard and 136th Street. The East Chicago Woman's Club has provided funds for scholarships and cultural projects.



## MARKTOWN

A 200-home community, Marktown, is located in one of the busiest sections of East Chicago. In 1914 the Mark Manufacturing Company was established. Since most workers did not own cars, Clayton Marks, owner of the factory, wanted to offer his employees an enjoyable environment. He commissioned a Chicago architect, Howard van Doren Shaw, to design a model town. The result is Marktown. Shaw studied many European worker cities before the completion of his plans. The result is the strong European feeling which pervades the community. The houses are of different sizes and provisions were included for recreational facilities, shops and schools. A hotel was also built, where rooms were rented only to men. Entertainment in the early community consisted of annual Christmas parties, and sports activities. Rents were low and were deducted from the employee's pay check. Care of the homes was provided by the company. The community was surrounded by fields, forest and a lake, but industrial expansion has eliminated these areas. In 1942 the homes were sold to individuals. Today Marktown has become a national landmark.



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## A DILLINGER ANECDOTE

On January 15, 1934, the First National Bank of East Chicago was robbed of over \$20,000 by two desperados. A plainclothes policeman, Pat O'Malley, was murdered during the escape. As reported by *The Hammond Times*, O'Malley's death was the fourth score for the John Dillinger convict gang. Many versions of the hold-up were given by eye-witnesses. The bandits, reported to have been John Dillinger and John Hamilton, entered the bank without attracting attention. While Hamilton held the bank personnel and customers at bay, Dillinger went from cage to cage and took all of the money. Fortunately there were no others injured during the robbery. Patrons and clerks of the nearby Newberry store narrowly escaped a shower of bullets poured into a show window. Dillinger's car was later discovered with several bullet holes in it on Kedzie Avenue in Chicago.



ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH



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## CARMELITE ORPHANAGE

In 1914 two Carmelite nuns walked into the office of Colonel Walter J. Riley and announced that they had come to East Chicago to start a day nursery. The Sisters made it clear that they had no funds and no backing, but would look around town for a suitable place to begin their nursery. An hour after leaving the office, they returned and announced that they had found an ideal location on Grasselli Avenue. Its owner was Colonel Riley, who agreed to let them use the cottage rent free. Several days later Colonel Riley visited the nuns found them busy making furniture. With them were six children who had been placed under their care. The home soon became a haven for orphans and forsaken, children whose parents had died or abandoned them. As time wore on the number of children increased. Finances were sparse and most of the income came as gifts. Finally in 1924 the Carmelite Home became a recipient of the Community Chest. In 1976 the Orphanage cares for an average of 200 parentless children every year.



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## OSWEGO'S ARENA

Oswego's Outdoor Arena, located at the northeast corner of Indianapolis Boulevard and Columbus Drive was a gathering place for sports fans of early East Chicago. Here many nationally famous boxers appeared to fight their matches. During bad weather, the fights took place on the second floor of a building over a saloon. One of the famous fighters was James Clabby of Hammond, who was at one time a middleweight champion and later held the heavyweight crown of Australia and New Zealand. Another fighter was "Tiger" Flowers, a preacher-boxer who always opened his Bible to pray before his fights. Ethnic boxers brought out many supporters on each side and these fights generally ended in a draw because it was feared the supporters were ready to make it a free-for-all in case their man lost.

\* This material is from accounts of the Calumet contributed to the Historical Society by Joseph Piekarczyk, of Hammond, who grew to maturity in this area.



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## INDIANA HARBOR WOMAN'S CLUB

The early women of Indiana Harbor realized the need for club activities. As a result, on September 4th, 1904, the Literary Musical Culture Club was organized. Meetings were held every Wednesday in the homes of the 19 members. One meeting was held monthly and husbands were invited. At the time this was the only social event in Indiana Harbor. Its successor, the Women's Progress Club, was originally organized as a Republican Club in 1908 to promote the campaign of Howard Taft for President. After the election the club was reorganized in 1911. Its initial meeting was held in the basement of the Indiana Harbor Branch of the Public Library. Programs covered various subjects including literature, music, civics and needle-work. In 1913 a merger between the Women's Roundtable Club and the Women's Club was held. The name was officially changed to the Indiana Harbor Woman's Club in 1915.



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## THE PARRISH AVENUE FOUNTAIN

Many of the streets in East Chicago were named for prominent stockholders of land companies. There is an interesting story about John C. Parrish, a stockholder in the East Chicago Company, for whom Parrish Avenue was named. Mr. Parrish was so pleased at this honor that he ordered the construction of an iron drinking fountain for man and beast at the intersection of Chicago and Parrish Avenues. The citizens of East Chicago could not bring themselves to inform Mr. Parrish that the nearest source of water was Lake Michigan several miles away. When word came that he would come on a certain day, much effort was made hauling buckets of water from the nearest wells and pouring them into a concealed wooden vat, which was connected to the fountain. Mr. Parrish was escorted to the fountain where a short ceremony took place. He took the first drink and was hurried away before the supply of water in the hidden tank was exhausted.



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## HOW THEY FOUGHT FIRES

Early residents of East Chicago depended on bucket brigades to protect their homes from fire. In 1893 a volunteer fire department was organized. The department had hand-drawn hose carts and hand pumps, stored in various parts of town. When a whistle would blow, men would drop what they were doing, run to the nearest hose house, pull the equipment to the fire and attempt to extinguish it. As the city grew, horse-drawn equipment was used. In 1906 the Number One Station, located near City Hall, had a steam kettle, a hose cart, and a buggy for the chief. Since Indiana Harbor was almost inaccessible, a hose cart was located in the Number Two Station at Guthrie and Elm Streets. In 1906 the Fire Department was organized as a part of city government. In 1912 a motor driven pumper was purchased. Two years later a hook and ladder truck was purchased, making East Chicago one of the earlier cities to have a motorized fire department.



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## “AS A PIONEER SAW IT”

Mr. Clarence C. Smith was one of the first to come to East Chicago and was an employee of the Pennsylvania Railroad. He describes East Chicago in 1889 as follows. “In those days, the Pennsylvania Company trains were our only means of transportation. There were no streets or sewers, no electric lights, water works or gas. We had one mail in and out per day, which came in via horse and buggy from Hammond. There were probably 1,000 people here at that time, a few business houses on Chicago Avenue and a few on Olcott Avenue. The land was very swampy and a person could not walk very far in any direction without hip boots. There were sand streets graded south as far as 151st Street and the town seemed to be growing southward much faster than the north, while the east side was nothing but jungles.”



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## EAST CHICAGO FEDERATION OF CLUBS

The East Chicago City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs was organized in June, 1926 by Mrs. Gussie Russell at St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church. The club was to promote fellowship, togetherness and cooperation among the federated clubs within East Chicago better to serve the community. The three original clubs in setting up the Federation were: The Women's Improvement Club, Calumet Art and Welfare Club, and the Alpha Art Club. Throughout the years other clubs have joined. These include the Progressive Literary and Art Club and Workers for Culture. The first effort of the Federation was to furnish a room in St. Catherine Hospital, which was under construction at the time. The Federation has continued to unite the efforts of club women in charity, welfare and community work. Contributions have been made to various agencies in the community. These range from the Milk Fund to contributions to the construction of three of the community centers.



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## AN EARLY NEWSPAPER

In 1913 Joseph J. Freeman purchased the TWIN CITY SENTINEL, a newspaper published in Indiana Harbor. At the time East Chicago lacked a daily paper and citizens urged the Freemans to publish a daily. As the elections of 1921 approached, increased pressure was brought to bear on the Freemans. They were promised moral and financial support. The LAKE COUNTY TIMES indicated its intention to support the Independent party. The Freemans believed the Republican candidate to be the best. Encouraged by offers of support, the SENTINEL began as a daily a few months before the election. The ensuing campaign was the most bitter in the city's history. Friendships were broken and insults hurled at each other by the candidates for mayor. On election day the governor had the state militia ready to move into the city should trouble erupt. In the course of the excitement, a number of supporters of the winning ticket decided to celebrate the victory by wrecking the SENTINEL's plant. The damage was \$25,000 and the SENTINEL eventually went bankrupt.



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## THE LATIN AMERICANS

Before the First World War the Mexican population in East Chicago was about 25. During a strike in 1919, steel companies sent agents to Mexico, Texas, and Kansas to recruit workers who were brought back in car- and train-load lots. Many came intending to return to their homes later, and many of them did when employment slowed down. By 1930, however, more than 5,000 Mexicans were living in East Chicago, which was about 10% of the city's population. The early workers were housed in barrack-like structures, which proved unpopular with the workers. In time a colony developed in the residential area adjacent to the plants. This was in part due to convenience and choice, but it was also due to discrimination. Many of the established residents were unwilling to rent or live near Mexicans. As the community grew, Mexicans established shops, recreation centers, fraternal organizations, and churches. A newspaper, *El Amigo del Hogar*, devoted to the news of the local Mexican community, was published.



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## A FEW "FIRSTS"

Some interesting "firsts" for East Chicago are these: The first manufacturing plant was started in 1888 and was the William Graver Tank Works. A.H. Smith was the first licensed saloon keeper. Town licenses at the time were one hundred dollars annually. The saloon was closed at seven o'clock every evening. At that time there was plenty of game and in the evening men would take a gun and go out wolf hunting. The entire area was composed of swamps and ridges, which were later leveled. Because of the swamps, Hammond was almost impossible to reach. The first work toward the building of the town site of East Chicago was on the first day of April, 1888. The first teacher in East Chicago was Mrs. Stratford.



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## THEATERS OF EARLY EAST CHICAGO

One of the more important forms of entertainment in Early East Chicago were vaudeville and moving picture houses. Among the pioneers in ownership and operation were George Brandt and Julius Nassau. Mr. Brandt operated the Gem Theater, located on Michigan Avenue. Mr. Nassau ran the Columbia which had a seating capacity of 472 and at times featured vaudeville entertainment. Many other theaters were in existence at the time and included the Pictureland, on Guthrie Street, the Broadway and the Vogue. The Indiana Theatre was constructed in 1925 with a seating capacity of 1500, making it the largest theater in the city. It was a "first" in the development of movie techniques and a pioneer in the introduction of many innovations in the amusement field. The second largest theater in East Chicago, the Garden, had a seating capacity of 1000.



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## PATRONS

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